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AUTHOR Gaitan, Marcela Trujillo
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ABSTRACT

The term "macho" has been increasingly incorporated into the English language with various connotations and definitions, i.e., male cheuvinist, superman, and hyper-manliness Yet these words are not substitutions for "macho" which has an intrinsic value of its own. For English speakers, the most prevalent definition is "virile". While this is a correct definition, it is not the only meaning the concept has for Mexicans and Chicanos. To Chicanos, "machismo" has both positive and negative aspects. Positive aspects include: bravery, loyalty, pride in self, leadership responsibility, respect for religion and elders, modesty, and good manners. Negative aspects include: absolute power in the form of exploitation, self-centeredness, violence used to maintain power through fear, and closed aloofness; women seen as subordinate creatures, created to make man's lot more comfortable and pleasurable; too much pride; and too modest and reserved for survival in today's society. While some positive and negative aspects seem to cancel each other, it is generally the individual who defines "macho" in the Chicano community. As the word "macho" has taken on many and varied definitions, the word "hembra", which is its female counterpart, must also acquire many positive definitions besides "fertile". This paper discusses the various definitions of "macho"; its historical background; how writers such as Bernice Rincon, Samuel Ramos, Octavio Paz, Anna Mayo, and Aniceto Aramoni have used it; and means whereby Chicanas can begin to assert themselves. (Author/NQ)

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The Terminology of Machismo

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By: Marcela Trujillo Gaitan

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Chicano Studies
University of Minnesota
489 Ford Hall
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

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The term 'macho' has been increasingly incorporated into the English language with as many connotations or definitions as the English speakers who use it. It exists alongside words such as 'male chauvinist,' 'superman,' 'hypermanliness,' etc., yet those words are not substitutions for 'macho' which seems to mean that it has an intrinsic value of its own. For English speakers, 'macho' covers a multitude of definitions, the most prevalent one being 'virile,' i.e. sexy. "Virile," while being a correct definition, is not the only one apported to the concept by Mexicans and Chicanos. However, its female counterpart 'hembra,' is used with only one connotation of the word: fertile. The terms 'hembra' and 'macho' are used respectively as 'male breeder' and 'female breeder' in the plant and animal world.

"Machismo" to the Chicanos has both positive and negative aspects. Bernice Rincon, in her article, "La Chicana," (Regeneracion, p. 17) lists both. The positive, she states as: (1) bravery, loyalty (2) pride in self as an individual (3) responsibility of leadership in the family (4) sacredness of the family (5) human values: Love of humanity, compassion for suffering, liberty for all (6) lack of concern for money (7) love of music and dancing (joy of life) (8) love of children (9) respect for religion (10) respect for elders (11) modesty and reserve (12) liberal political orientation (13) good manners (14) willingness to fight when needed. The negative aspects are: (1) absolute power in the form of a. exploitation, b. self-centeredness, c. violence used to maintain power through fear, d. closed aloofness, (2) women seen as subordinate creatures, created to make man's lot more comfortable and pleasurable (3) too much pride

(4) absolute power inclination to strong man politics; hero worship-dictatorships (5) a sharing of the joys of life only as the man sees fit(woman's place is in the home.) (6) Large families (here the Church has also contributed). (7) too much responsibility placed on the male to maintain his "position." (8) drinking, wenching, etc., seen as a sign of manhood (9) fighting seen as a proof of masculinity (10) too modest and reserved for survival in today's society.

While some positive and negative aspects seem to cancel each other, it is generally the definition which defines 'macho' in the Chicano community.

However, it should be emphasized that when Chicanos speak about machismo, they identify with the positive aspects. And when Chicanas talk about machismo, they are referring to the negative aspects. Therein lies the barrier to communication between the Chicanos and Chicanas.

Samuel Ramos in his book, Profile of man and culture in Mexico says that the negative machismo is very obvious in the 'pelado' - the poon. The pelado is the touchy Mexican with whom communication is not possible. He likes to quarrel and fight, expecially with words, and one of his favorite sayings to prove his manliness is "Tengo muchos huevos." (I have many eggs-(balls)). When he wants to humiliate and assert his superiority, he says to his opponent "I am your father." The need to express this superiority is not that he is inferior, but that he feels inferior. The complex is deeprooted in Mexican mestizo history. The pelado feels inadequate before a foreign civilized man.

He says such things as " A European has science, art, technology, etc., here in Mexico, we have machos." There is a cult to the phallic symbol, an obsession with it because he believes that it is the basis for masculine energy, and that in this organ lies not only sexual potency, but every kind of human potency. (Ramos, MME, p. 243). The peon, 'pelado' associates his concept of virility with that of nationality, creating the erroneous idea that valor is the peculiar mark of the Mexican. And nationality, too, says Ramos, itself creates a sense of inferiority. This sense of inferiority gives rise to machismo, an exaggerated masculinity, in order to overcome and transcend a history which has left its mark on the national psyche.

Briefly, we must revert to history. At the time of the Conquest when the Spaniards came to Mexico, the Conquistador, Hernan Cortes, took Dona Marina, a Mexican Indian to be his guide and mistress. Their offspring were the mestizos (the mixed race, or the fifth race as Vasconcelos calls it), and later generations blame Dona Marina for opening up the country to the foreign invador, first the Spaniards, then to the French and English and other nationalities until Mexico did not recognize herself as an auctoctonous country anymore, but as something European in customs and language. After the revolution of 1910, Mexico started to define itself in terms of its origins, especially the indigenous elements: in terms of its own regional differences and its particular place and time in history. Mexican Intellectuals started to define Mexicanism and a Mexican philosophy and began writing about their own particular lifestyle. Such sayings as "Mexico for the Mexicans" began to be repeated.

Mexican history had its effect also in the restructuring of a society which Octavio Paz in his book, Labyrinth of Solitude called closed and open. The open society belongs to the chingados (the screwed ones). The closed society is one ruled by chingones (the screwers). Paz cites Dona Marina (Malinche) as the classic example of the chingados. Malinche who gave herself to Cortes opened up Mexico to the Conquistadores with her body and her aid. She became the figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated, and seduced by the Spaniards. "And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malincha for her betrayal. She embodies the open, the chingado, and the Mexicans call her La Chingada. (Paz, LOS, p. 86)

Of the chingones, Paz calls the macho the gran chingon. The word 'macho' means power and all the ramifications of power: agressiveness, insensitivity, invulnerability and other attributes of power. It is the force without the discipline of any notion of order, arbitrary power, the will without reins and without a set course (Paz, p. 81). The men in power are all chingones. They are the caciques, the feudel lords, hacienda owners, politicians, generals, captains of industry and they resemble the Spanish Conquistador. These are the people of the closed society. Macho power almost always reveals itself as a capacity for wounding, humiliating and annihilating. (p. 82). The chingon is the macho, the male who rips open the chingada, the female who is pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world (p. 77). Women, Paz says are inferior beings because in submitting they open themselves up. Their inferiority is constitutional and resides in their sex; their submissiveness is a wound that never heals.

"This open and closed society reveals that the Mexican views life as combat. This attitude does not make him any different from anyone else in the modern world. For other people, however, the manly ideal consists in an open and agressive fondness for combat, whereas Mexicans emphasize defensiveness, the readiness to repel any attact. The Mexican macho is a hermetic being, closed up in himself, capable of guarding both himself and whatever has been confided to him. Manliness is judged according to one's invulnerability to enemy arms or the impact of the outside world. Stoicism is exalted. Mexican history is full of expressions and incidents that demonstrate the indifference of their heroes toward suffering or danger." (Paz, 31). Hence the cult to Cuahtemoc, the last of the Aztec kings who sought death at the hands of the Spaniards rather than betray the secrets of the Aztec wealth.

The macho is the concept of manliness and the ideal of manliness is never to crack, never to break down. Those who open themselves up are cowards. Opening oneself up is a weakness or betrayal. There is a saying in Spanish that reinforces this:

El secreto de tu pecho
no se lo digas a tu amigo,
porque si le falta lealtad,
contra ti, sera testigo.

(The secret of your heart; do not reveal it even to your closest friend, for if he is not loyal, he will be the first to testify against you).

However, there are two times when the Mexican macho opens up and that is when he falls in love or gets drunk at a fiesta. When he falls in love, he reveals his intimate feelings, because an ancient tradition requires that the man suffering from love display his wounds to the loved one. When the Mexican gets drunk, also, he opens up and shouts, "Viva Mexico, hijos de la Chingada." (Long live Mexico, sons of the violated one!). This reveals the wound.

Mexico broke with Spain in 1810. With Benito Juarez's reform movement, Mexicans rejected the Spanish colonial tradition. "The Reform movement, was the great rupture with the mother. It broke, so to speak, with its family and with its past. But, the separation still hurts. Mexicans still suffer from that wound. That is why the feeling of orphanhood is the constant background of their political endeavors and their personal conflicts." (Paz, p. 88). It also taught the Mexicans that to open oneself to welcome the stranger, spells disaster.

Cortes and Malinche are symbols of a secret conflict that Mexicans have still not resolved. When the Mexican denies Dona Marina, the Mexican Eve, then the Mexican breaks his ties with his past. Thus he does not want to be either Spaniard or Indian, and considers himself only as a negation of that origin. This can lead to an inferiority complex to the extreme that Ramos describes as "a zero on the left side of a number," the result of the personality of the pelado/macho. The Mexican is the product of his history and social circumstances which has produced a dualism in his cultural personality. For the Mexican there are only two possibilities in life - either he inflicts the action implied by 'chingar' on others, or else he suffers them himself at the hands of others. (Paz, p. 78). And this most assuredly applies to women who are considered weak; who must be considered traitors because of the Mexican Eve, Dona Marina, and consequently, the women must be watched and protected from other males.

Many machos, both Mexicans and Chicanos may not know the Mexican mestizo history, and it is not necessary to know it to understand machismo. However, they have inherited the behaviorial characteristics of the generations before them, and are the culmination of a history of machos who invented "Chingoles," the language of machismo, based on a history that left them to choose between the closed and

the open. Pedro Mendoza has published a dictionary, El Chingoles in Mexico wherein the verb 'chingar' is defined, (translated) "to fuck, screw or do someone in, to abuse in every sense of the word; to discriminate but especially women; to change the order of things and of people."

In Labyrinth of Solitude, Paz says that this verb exists in other Spanish speaking countries, but with other definitions. In Mexico, Chingoles revolves around the powerful male and is the product of machismo. And Chingoles is peculiar to Mexicans and Chicanos.

Anna Mayo, in her article, "Mexico: Mucho Macho," elaborates further on this concept. She says that the Mexicana can only be understood in terms of her history, not only as the violated Catholic virgin, but as the raped Indian woman 'la chingada' as she is known in the language of popular blasphemy taken originally as spoils by the Spanish conquistador. Their children, los mestizos, are "hijos de la chingada." That is the reason that Don Juanismo is popular among Mexicans. They identify with their fathers, but at the same time they are extraordinarily protective of their mothers. It is not just the Oedipus complex that makes "hijos de la chingada" such a vile insult. It is the history of Mexico. (Mayo, p. 1180).

To transcend the historical parents, the Mexican has searched for and has adopted other masculine and feminine idols. Cuahtemoc became the masculine idol, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, often called the mother of orphans, is the female idol. Mexicans have combined both the Christian and Aztec religions by alternately calling her "Guadalupe Tonantzin" and "The Brown Virgin." Tonantzin was the Aztec goddess of fertility. The Mexican then has two historical mothers, one satanic (Dona Marina) and the other sacred, (The Virgin of Guadalupe). His own mother and sisters are placed on a pedestal alongside the Virgin, and the

other mother, Dona Marina is debased and placed alongside his actual wife. The duality of the sacred mother and the blasphemous mother is dualism that is reflected in the macho's treatment of women, his mother, his sisters, his wife and other women. Women did not invent machismo, but to some extent, they perpetuate it. The wife who feels neglected by her husband, caters to her male children, so that they, in turn, will put her on the pedestal and thus the hierarchy of the generations of machismo is perpetuated.

Aniceto Aramoni in his article "Machismo" has said that machismo represents an essentially pointless and destructive struggle by the man to overcome the humiliation of being an ineffectual little boy, especially in his mother's eyes. It is an illfated drama wherein the man, painfully attached to his mother, his sisters and the Virgin, seeks their exclusive admiration and worship. Overcompensating for his acute inner feelings in inadequacy and guilt, the machista struts through life giving and seeking challenges answerable in blood. The machista treats the women, his wife, like a thing, tries to make her feel inferior, good for nothing, unless what she is doing, is related to serving him, the master, in bed and out. And, like a feudal lord, he renders a woman docile, but resentful, submissive but passively resistant or actively negative. The wife reacts by taking possession of the children, especially the boys and asserts great influence over them. (Aramoni, Psychology Today, Jan. '72, p.69).

The macho, then, in order to be obvious as a macho, needs an hembra to prove his machismo, both in terms of how virile he is, how many women he can conquer, and also how much he can abuse his wife. We ofter hear that having a large family is part of our culture. But is it because Machismo, aided by Catholicism is ingrained in our culture. If both the man and his wife want a large family, that is their unquestionable right. But if the macho has not considered his wife, and has inflicted many children on her in order to prove

his manliness, then is guilty of cultural genocide on his wife.

The Chicano is a proud man. His pride stems from being able to support, protect and raise his family in a dignified manner. But living in a materialistic environment; an environment of inflation, sometimes means that the wife must work. This should not call for further debasement.

One solution, it seems to me, is a linguistic solution: an attack on Chingoles that revolves around the word 'madre' (mother) as a blasphemy. The fact that the most venerated word in the Spanish language, 'madre' is at once both a veneration and a blasphemy, is a manifestation of the dichotomy which exists among Chicano men and women. "Chinga tu madre," "que desmadre" and all the words of the desmadrazgo ought to be eradicated. The term "Es muy padre," to denote that something is superior also ought to be eliminated. The popular saying "Tengo muchos huevos" (I have many eggs) is an affront to the female, who, in fact, biologically has the eggs. Machos have castrated our female biological identity.

From a feminist point of view, the Spanish language itself, could be reformed. When we speak in Spanish we are in a man's world. The Spanish language uses male genders to include both male and female. In Spanish, we say 'the uncles' to mean both aunt and uncle; we say 'the brothers' to mean both brothers and sisters; we say 'the boys' to mean both boys and girls; we say 'the sons' to indicate both sons and daughters, etc. If we would start emphasizing and making distinctions of the sexes when we speak the Spanish language, we could, perhaps, revolutionize the thinking, and perhaps, the behavior. An attack on the language is the greatest form of revolution.

Small wonder then, that Mexican women and Chicanas are only a reflection of man's perspective of reality. According to Paz, the Mexican woman simply has no will of her own; is considered an answer rather than a question; is passive, deep, dark and mysterious, and because of the Mexican

The Chicana has been conditioned to be dependent on the males in her family. The woman cannot easily think of herself as an individual entity because her orientation and world view has been male domination. In our culture, in many cases, this is manifested by the fact that older widows usually follow their husbands to the grave in a relatively short time.

Education is a mean whereby Chicanas have begun to assert themselves. This has sometimes been taken to mean a rebellion against cultural values, when in effect, it has been a rebellion against the negative values of machismo. Each macho has good and bad qualities of machismo. Some negative aspects are more intensified in some machos than in others. The Chicana whose macho is a personification of all of the negative values has a harder struggle in the quest for self-identity. The end result has been frustration in the Chicana's attempt to find herself in a modern world.

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